

1999

# Town of Amesbury

UMass Amherst Center Economic Development

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/ced\\_techrpts](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/ced_techrpts)

 Part of the [Economic History Commons](#), [Growth and Development Commons](#), [Public Economics Commons](#), [Urban, Community and Regional Planning Commons](#), [Urban Studies Commons](#), and the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)

---

UMass Amherst Center Economic Development, "Town of Amesbury" (1999). *Center for Economic Development Technical Reports*. 43.  
Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/ced\\_techrpts/43](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/ced_techrpts/43)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Economic Development at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Center for Economic Development Technical Reports by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@library.umass.edu](mailto:scholarworks@library.umass.edu).

# AMESBURY

Amesbury is a suburban community with abundant natural resources and a delightful village core. The gently rolling hills embrace working farms, parks, historic and developing neighborhoods and the Merrimack and Powwow Rivers while the downtown district has taken center stage in the town's \$4 million revitalization plan. The historic mills and 19<sup>th</sup> century stone commercial buildings of Amesbury attest to the community's history as a maritime and industrial center and their re-construction clearly show the town's commitment to its economic future. Strong leadership from Amesbury's municipal government is supported by diverse citizen groups and business organizations. The results are numerous and on-going and include industrial areas, parks and open spaces, a river-walk, a comprehensive downtown revitalization effort, a farmers market, historic designations for buildings and districts, community festivals, cultural amenities, and business districts. The town of Amesbury is actively pursuing its goals to become a vital commercial center as well maintain its unpretentious ambience and hometown conviviality.

## General information:

Established:	1645 (settled) Incorporated 1668 (DHCD)
Type of Community:	Rural Economic Center(DOR)
Total Land Area:	13.65 square miles (DHCD)
Location:	43 miles north of Boston, on the Merrimack River 70 miles south of Portland, Maine 20 miles from Portsmouth, New Hampshire 253 miles from New York City
Population:	16,000 (Amesbury brochure)
Density:	1,172 per square mile
Form of Government:	Mayor City Council

## Community Assets

The following Community Assets were identified by Nick Cracknell, Town Planner, Jennifer Raitt, Community Development Program Director, and Sue Brown for CED.

1. The development pattern of Amesbury's downtown is that of an European village center, providing a walkable village core. (Cracknell, Raitt)
2. Amesbury is a progressive community that is open to new ideas. (Raitt)
3. The town's recently approved Cluster Zoning allows a 20% density bonus. (Cracknell)

4. The Merrimack River helps define the town and provides it with outstanding recreational and financial opportunities. (Brown)
5. The town has an aggressive Town Planner and supportive staff. (Brown)
6. The Town's planners and agents enjoy a shared community vision with the Town's residents. (Brown)
7. Amesbury is blessed with unique and distinct neighborhoods. (Brown)
8. The historic character of the town is well preserved. (Brown)
9. Volunteerism and community effort are reflective of the town's sense of community. (Brown)

## General

Established:	1668, Settled in 1645
Type of Community:	Rural Economic Center (DOR), Suburban Community (MVPC)
Total Land Area:	13.65 (DHCD)
Location:	43miles north of Boston on the Merrimack River ,70 miles south of Portland, Maine, 20 miles from Portsmouth New Hampshire and 253 miles from New York City (DHCD)
Population per Square Mile:	1,172 (1999 DOR)
Population:	1980 – 13,971 persons (1980 US Census) 1990 – 14,997 persons (1990 US Census) 1998 – 16,000 persons according to a 1998 Alliance for Amesbury Brochure
Population Projections:	2000 – 15,869 persons (MISER) 2010 – 16,363 persons (MISER)

## Economic Data

According to the Alliance for Amesbury skilled craftsmen and an enthusiastic work force continue to be one of the community's strong selling point. In addition the town boasts numerous locations well suited to retail, commercial and industrial enterprise. These can be found in the heart of downtown, along commercial corridors radiating out from the center and in Amesbury's "Golden Triangle", Hunt Road Industrial Area and Amesbury Industrial Park.

## Labor Force

1990 Average Time to Work: 22.6 minutes (1990 US Census)  
 1998 Labor Force: 8,301 Employment (1999 DET)  
 1998 Unemployment Rate: 3.3%, State Average 3.3% (1999 DET)  
 1997 Wages: Total annual payroll \$138,268,527 (DET)  
 Average annual payroll \$29,482 (DET)  
 1997 Employment: 347 Establishments employing 4,690 people (DET)

<u># of Persons Employed</u>	<u>Type of Establishment</u>	<u>Percentage of Total</u>
43	Agriculture	0.9%
738	Government	15.7%
134	Construction	2.9%
1,658	Manufacturing	35.4%
182	TCTU (Transportation, Communication, Public Utilities)	3.9%
781	Trade	16.7%
118	FIRE (Finance, Insurance, Real Estate)	2.5%
1,036	Services	22.0%
Total:		100.0%

## Largest Employers (Amesbury Alliance, 1999)

1.	MA/COM	315
2.	Eastern Propane Gas	225
3.	Tech-ceran	150
4.	Bartley Machine	150
5.	Mariner Health Care	150
6.	Harborside Health Care	150

## 1990 Income (US Census)

Per Capita Income: \$15,423, State Rank 227  
 Median Household Income: \$37,889, State Rank 204



## FY 99 Tax Levy and Assessed Value (1999 DOR)

<u>Tax Classification</u>	<u>Tax Rate</u>	<u>Tax Levy</u>	<u>Assessed Value</u>	<u>Percentage of Total</u>
Residential	\$17.45	\$12,373,083	\$709,059,200	81.0%
Open Space	\$00.00	\$ 0	\$ 0	0.0%
Commercial	\$17.45	\$ ,420,682	\$ 81,414,430	9.3%
Industrial	\$17.45	\$ 1,061,100	\$ 60,808,000	6.9%
Personal Property	\$17.45	\$ 427,402	\$ 24,492,942	2.8%
Total:		\$14,282,267	\$875,774,572	100.0%

## Education (DOE)

Educational Attainment:	79.8% High School Graduate or Higher (1990 US Census)	
	19.4% Bachelor's Degree or Higher (1990 US Census)	
Amesbury Public Schools:	Amesbury.	
- Elementary	Horace Mann School, grades N-K	
	Amesbury Elementary, grades K-4	
	Charles C. Cashman, grades 1-5	
- Middle School	Amesbury Middle School, grades 6-8	
- High School	Amesbury High School, grades 9-12	
Other (Public) High Schools:	Whittier Regional Vocational High School, grades 9-12	
	Essex Agricultural and Technical Institute, grades 9-14	
Statistic for Grades 9-12:	<u>District Average</u>	<u>State Average</u>
Number Students per Teacher (1996-7)	17.5	18.0
Percent Planning 4-year College (1996-7)	50%	53.4%
SAT Scores - Verbal (1998)	514	502
- Math (1998)	506	502
- Participation Rate (1998)	76	76%
Drop-Out Rate (1996-7)	2.2%	3.4%
Colleges:	None	

Metropolitan Statistical Area: Boston

## Housing

As the historic village center developed around the Powwow River and its industries, neighborhoods in Amesbury grew around the town's other amenities, the navigable Merrimack, hillsides offering vistas, and lakes. The results today are a mix of neighborhood as well as a diversity of styles and prices. Antique colonials and stately Victorians predominate many of the Highlands and Downtown neighborhoods. More can be found on Point Shore along the Merrimack. Because of this neighborhood's unique character, efforts are underway to create this as another Historic District. (J. Raitt)

Homes in the Lake Attitash and Lake Gardner area are a progression of styles from 1920 bungalows to contemporaries. Of particular note is that 46.3% were built in 1939 or earlier. (DHCD)

Amesbury's ability to still offer affordable housing to a wide range of consumers makes it a choice community for many. According to 1990 Census figures 42.4% of Amesbury's housing stock was non-owner occupied. Comparing this figure to Nick Cracknells figures that showed that one out of three units is within, a multi-unit complex and one out of three units is an a multi-family dwelling it is apparent that home ownership is not the only option for new residents.

Number of Housing Units:	5,996 (1990 US Census and MVPC Data)
Owner versus Rental-Occupied:	57.6% vs. 42.4% (1990 US Census)
Subsidized Housing Inventory:	289units or 2.88% of all units in Town (1993 DHCD).
Public Housing Units:	255 Conventional State (1997 Community)
Rental Assistance:	38 State (MVRP), Federal (Section 8) 80 ( 1993-94 DHCD)
1999 Tax Rate:	\$17.45 (1999 DOR) – 1998 State average \$16.96 (DOR)
1999 Avrg. Single-Family Tax Bill:	\$2,692 (1999 DOR)
1998 Median Sales Price:	(1999 Banker & Tradesman)
- Single-Family	\$160,000, 26 Single-Family Units
- Condominium	\$ 85,000, 20 Condominium Units
Jan-April 1999 Median Sales Price:	(1999 Banker & Tradesman)
- Single-Family	\$185,000, 35Single-Family Units
- Condominium	\$81,000, 10 Condominium Units
Zoning:	8,000 sq.ft. minimum lot area (DHCD)

## Transportation

Amesbury is well positioned to take advantage of the region's excellent transportation network.

Miles of Roadway:	Approximately 73.32 (1999, MVPC)
	Principle Highways: Amesbury is at the crossroads of Interstate 95, which links the community with Boston, and Interstate 495, the outer belt around Boston. Route 110 contributes the third side to Amesbury's "Golden Triangle" providing exceptional access to this area for business and industry. Route 150 makes additional north-south connections, as does Interstate 93, another major highway route that intersects with 495 west of Amesbury in Andover, Massachusetts.
Rail Service:	Available since October 1998 from the neighboring Newburyport MBTA station (travel time 60 minutes). (1999 MBTA)
Bus Service:	Available from C & J Trailways in adjacent Newburyport (travel time 45 minutes). Amesbury is a member of the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVPC) which provides fixed route service between Haverhill, Amesbury and Newburyport.
Air Service:	The Lawrence Municipal Airport located in North Andover is the closest facility. Logan Airport is approximately 35 miles to the south and Manchester, NH Airport is approx. 30 miles to the north.

## Natural Resources (1996 Open Space Plan)

The backdrop to the village and neighborhoods that are Amesbury is a landscape of abundant natural resources. Most significant are its rivers, the Powwow and the Merrimack. Historically used for power and transportation, these water bodies now provide the community with tremendous recreational opportunities and maintain its link to its industrial and maritime history. Amesbury is active in both its preservation and development of these resources. One example of the Town's efforts is the Powwow Riverwalk and Bikeway. Currently under construction, this trail will follow along the Powwow River between Downtown and Route 110 integrating this recreational asset with local businesses.

Amesbury has a number of lakes within its town boundaries as well. Three of these are publicly owned. Lake Attitash offering a boat ramp, fishing and wind-surfing, Lake Gardner providing a public beach with lifeguard, and Tuxbury Pond which offers boating, swimming hiking and camping.

While agriculture does not play a big role in Amesbury's economy, the Town is anxious to preserve farmland to protect its rural character and preserve this dwindling natural resource.



Over 1100 acres are temporarily protected under Chapter 61 Laws, which provides temporary protection, and to date, one property has been approved for the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program (APRP). The APRP is a type of conservation restriction in which, essentially, a landowner signs a covenant promising the State that the land will not be developed for non-agricultural purposes, in perpetuity. The State will pay the landowner a sum not exceeding the difference between the value of the land before it was restricted and its value for farming purposes after restriction. (1996 Open Space Plan)

37.23 % of Amesbury remains wooded providing neighborhoods with privacy buffers and keeping intact the rural countryside that provides both pleasing views and ample recreational opportunities.

Rivers and Streams:	Merrimack River, Powwow River, Goodwin's Creek, Meadowbrook
Water Supply:	Approximately 98% of Amesbury's houses are served by Town water. The Powwow River is the primary water supply, with a backup system consisting of two wells.
Sewer	The sewer system is extensive. It provides service for the central core of the community, all major residential arterials, and the major commercial/industrial areas along Route 110 and Hunt road. The town has recently completed and upgraded its sewer treatment plant, such that the existing treatment capacity is sufficient to accommodate significant growth.
Lakes & Ponds:	Lake Attitash, Lake Gardner, Tuxbury Pond
Other Waterbodies:	Great Swamp (500 acres)
Watersheds:	Merrimack River Watershed.
ACEC's:	None (DEM)

## Cultural Resources

Cultural and historical resources in Amesbury include organizations, facilities and services. Through these resources community members seek to protect and promote the history of Amesbury and its peoples as well as to promote access to Arts, Humanities and Interpretive Sciences. Newsletters, websites, monthly meetings, grant applications studies and plans organized and implemented by the various museums and organizations attest to the efforts that Amesbury is putting forth on behalf of its cultural vitality.

Some of Amesbury's cultural resources include:

The Public Library  
 The Playhouse, Inc.  
 Bartlett Museum  
 Carriage Museum  
 Lowell Boat Shop



New City Arts Foundation  
 Salisbury Point Railroad  
 Whittier Home  
 The Amesbury Cultural Council

### **Open Space and Recreation**

Amesbury's water, forests, agricultural land and urban parks all contribute to the town's impressive list of open space and recreation resources. Some of the most notable recreational areas in Amesbury include the 400 acre Woodsom Farm, The Battis Farm, Camp Kent and Town Forest. The totals of these give Amesbury over 547 acres of Town Parks, over 677 acres of land for active recreation and open space and nearly 34 acres of conservation land. While these present Amesbury with a wide range of recreation options, the town is aggressively seeking to increase these public amenities.

### **Other Town-Supported Services**

Council on Aging:	Maintains a Senior Center that is a focal point for programs and services as well as a drop-in site. Programs range from social and recreation to education and health. A hot meal program, Meals on Wheels, transportation programs, volunteer programs and many other assistance services are available.
Fire and Ambulance:	Municipal
Police:	Municipal
Harbormaster:	Harbormaster issues water-related permits and works with
Solid Waste:	Curbside pick up and recycling provided.
Cemeteries:	6 (125.95 acres)

### **Public Safety** (Massachusetts State Police, Crime Reporting Unit)

	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>
Total Crimes Reported	278	28
Violent Crimes	14	0
Property Crimes	264	28

Additional Town amenities including health facilities, churches, programs, organizations, and media all contribute to the quality of life in Amesbury. Although it maintains a small town ambience the following shows the depth of services and urban amenities that the town offers.

General health services are provided by the Amesbury Health Center. Numerous elder care, rehabilitation facilities and private practitioners are also available.

Churches include Baptist, Congregational, Episcopal, Pentecostal, Methodist, New Lutheran Mission, Quaker, Roman Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist.

In addition to the public schools there are 61 licensed family day care providers in Amesbury and four licensed day care centers.

Amesbury News is the weekly local newspaper. The Daily News of Newburyport also serves Amesbury and the surrounding towns.

Volunteer groups and service organizations have a history in Amesbury. The Amesbury Improvement Association is one of the oldest, going back over 140 years. Over the years its members have donated lands, developed and maintained parks, raised funds and generally improved the town in numerous ways. Other active groups include Friends of the Powwow River, Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary and Knights of Columbus.

The pulse of a town can often be taken by counting the number of community events that take place over the year. In Amesbury these include Amesbury Days, a weeklong celebration culminating in music and fireworks, Music at the Millyard, an outdoor concert series, and Christmas at Market Square, a tree lighting, caroling and Santa parade.

#### Land Use (MVPC, 1991 MassGIS)

<u>Land Use Classification</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Percentage of Total</u>
Cropland	1,039	11.82%
Pasture	126	1.43%
Forest	3,272	37.23%
Wetland	194	2.21%
Mining	230	2.62%
Open Land	187	2.13%
Recreation (Participation)	106	1.21%
Recreation (Spectator)	49	0.56%
Residential (1/2 to 1/2 acre lots)	116	1.32%
Residential (>1/2 acre lots)	.. 446	5.07%
Salt Wetlands	0	0.00%
Commercial	...132	... 1.5%
Industrial	197	2.24%
Urban Open (Parks, Cemeteries)	288	3.28%
Transportation	220	2.5%
Waste Disposal	.....6	....0.07%
Water	869	9.89%
Woody Perennial	<u>11</u>	<u>0.13%</u>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>9,448</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Contacts included:

Nick Cracknell, Town Planner, Interview 6/3/99 (978) 388-8110  
Jennifer Raitt, Community Development Program Director, Interview 6/7/99 (978) 388-8110  
Amy Steeves, Alliance for Amesbury, Telephone Interview 6/24/99, (978-388-8110)  
Bonnie, Town Clerk, Telephone Interview 6/24/1999, (978-388-8100)

Document sources included:

Amesbury Community Profile (DHCD)  
Department of Revenue (At a Glance Report for Amesbury, 1999)  
Department of Employment and Training  
Department of Education, Amesbury Public School District Profile, 1997-1998  
Town Stats by Banker & Tradesman  
Massachusetts State Police, Crime Reporting Unit  
MVPC, MassGIS 1991 Land Use Classifications  
Town of Amesbury Open Space and Recreation Plan 1996  
Merrimack Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, 1998  
Amesbury's Design Guideline, 1999  
Town of Amesbury Massachusetts Zoning Bylaw and Map, 1999  
Amesbury Cyber District Pilot Project Study, 1999  
*Amesbury, Massachusetts*, Amesbury Chamber of Commerce publication  
*Amesbury Council on Aging* publication  
*Amesbury Public Schools* publication  
*Welcome*, The Amesbury Cultural Council publication  
*New Developments*, Amesbury Office of Community & Economic Development  
newsletter, Spring 1999  
*Amesbury Street Map, Business Directory, Carriage Tour, and Things to Do and See*,  
Alliance for Amesbury, Inc. publication  
*Re-construction of a New England Village Amesbury Massachusetts*, Alliance for  
Amesbury publication